

THE CITY OF GREAT PRINCIPLES

The easy communication with the fair ground by way of ⁵⁰⁵ junks on the lake make this fair a great centre for the sale of ⁴⁴³ heavy and bulky goods. Coffin boards, brought from the ⁴³⁸ walnut forests on the Chi Tsu Shan, the mountain on the east ⁷⁶⁴ side of the lake, have a ready sale. The Min Chia, like the Chinese, are accustomed to buy the wood and have their coffins made up in readiness for their own death when they have reached a ripe age. This, which seems rather macabre to the European, is not so regarded in China. It is looked upon as a prudent measure of insurance, no more morbid than membership of a Burial Assurance Society would be in Europe. The Min Chia are at one with the Chinese in paying a great deal of attention and spending a lot of money on funerals, tombs, and the other apparatus of decease, and consequently the coffin trade uses only the best hard woods, walnut for choice.

Ta Li hard granite cut into millstones, or in slabs which ³²⁴ can be joined up to make a water tank, is also brought to the ⁴⁴³ Yu Tan Hui by the ship load, for there is no such suitable ⁴³⁸ stone in the northern and eastern districts whence many of those attending the fair come. Grindstones from further south, and of course, white Ta Li marble tombstones also have a large sale. All these goods are brought by boat, and ⁵⁰⁵ many of the visitors from the lake side villages and towns ⁴⁴³ and from Ta Li itself come to this fair by boat. In the ⁴³⁸ summer, when there may be rain, and the roads are still boggy it is far more comfortable to travel by the lake boats, protected from the rain if it comes by the mat cabin top, or from the sun by the shadow of the towering mat sail. On the day before the fair opens the surface of the lake is dotted with dozens of boats converging on Shang Kuan and the rocky shore by the Yu Tan Hui site, some deep laden with stone or coffin boards, others buried under a mass of tables and chairs, the movable properties of a restaurant or tea